

DOMESTIC RESOURCE MOBILISATION AND ZAMBIA'S 'FOREST GOLD RESOURCES': THE CASE OF MUKULA TREES

PRESS STATEMENT

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Photo: Zambia Daily Mail online

Zambia has just been commemorating Farmer's Day, which is of great importance to the agriculture sector and economy at large. We take stock of the gains made in promoting diversification of the economy. Agriculture has clearly emerged as the Government's torch bearer and sector of choice to push Zambia's economic diversification programme for obvious reasons and the 2018 Budget bears proof of this. It links well with the 7NDP whose aspirations are centred on a diversified and export-oriented agriculture sector.

In the 2017 Budget Address, Government made strong commitments to promote diversification and wealth creation in many sectors of the economy. This included the promotion of value addition in the forestry sector with a proposal to introduce specific rates on the export of unprocessed and semi-processed timber products at the rate of K10 per kg and K5 per kg respectively. Other measures included support to economic diversification and promoting capital investment by increasing the capital allowance for plant, equipment and machinery used in farming and agro-processing to 100 percent from 50 percent.

Zambia's aspirations to diversify its economy away from the mining industry to other sectors such as agriculture and forestry are fully supported by the Seventh National Development Plan, which states that; the forestry industry, if properly nurtured, can significantly contribute to employment and wealth creation. Zambia Forestry and Forest Industries Corporation (ZAFFICO) currently employs a good number of people under the tree planting exercise, financed by the Government. Estimates made by ZAFFICO management indicate that , land clearing, preparation and planting of 40,000 hectares of land would provide direct employment opportunities to 40,000 seasonal employees. If this exercise was to be undertaken in designated sites in all the provinces at an expanded rate, the impact on job creation and incomes would be significant. This will contribute to eliminating social exclusion faced by the majority of the people who are unskilled and have had no employment opportunities for decades. In addition to this, strategic interventions set out to achieve this include the acquisition of 50,000

hectares of land in each province for forest plantations to be established by ZAFFICO, support for value addition to wood and non-wood forest products, promotion of investments through public-private partnerships in environment, forestry and other natural resources and the promotion of applied research on forests, forest products and the environment.

Given Zambia's Demographic Dividend Study findings which assessed the economic and human development potential of the country in the short, medium and long-term using a comprehensive approach, the country can harness a "demographic dividend," resulting from declining mortality and fertility rates, strong institutional capacities, healthy and skilled human capital, improved decent job prospects and an inclusive governance system. To take advantage of this prospect an enabling environment needs to be created that ensures citizens claim their rights to education, health, development, and live free from violence and discrimination. The demographic dividend report for Zambia requires timely, strategic, targeted and simultaneous investments in various sectors of the economy in an integrated manner, and enables the translation of policies into equitable, cost-effective interventions that leave "no one" behind.

Diversifying the economy and reducing over-dependence on the extractive industry by modernising the agriculture sector and prioritising value addition requires well thought out policy interventions for monitoring and evaluation and constant planning processes.

Zambia's forests are endowed with some of the most valuable timber resources that include the Mukula tree, scientifically called "Pterocarpus erinaceus" which takes about 80 to 90 years to fully mature. Dubbed as Zambia's Forest Gold Resource, the Mukula tree has the potential to increase Zambia's Resource Mobilisation efforts and contribute to the country's earnings through export of finished timber products and increased investments in the sector.

A Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) study titled 'Informality, global capital, rural development and the environment: Mukula (Rosewood) trade between China and Zambia.' published in March 2018 examined the political economy of the international Mukula trade and the role of global capital, in particular that of Chinese origin in Zambia, and its impacts on rural livelihoods, the environment and resource governance.

The study showed that rural villagers increasingly forged direct links with foreign investors and produced innovative business models that accelerate the rate of small-scale production and extraction of resources under limited Government supervision. In 2017 the Government banned the harvesting, transportation, trading and exportation of the Mukula tree in accordance with Statutory Instrument (SI) number 94 of 2015 and also mandated the Zambia Forestry and Forest Industries Corporation Limited (ZAFFICO) to auction confiscated Mukula.

PMRC therefore recommends that the Government of the Republic of Zambia protect the Zambian forests against depletion and take stock of the resource availability for better planning. The recommended stock assessment of the timber resources must be conducted on a regular basis to ensure the country has accurate stock information. Given the challenges that threaten the existence of Zambia's forests and tree species such as the Mukula there is need to improve the capacity of local forestry departments which are poorly staffed, leaving vast areas of forest in different parts of the country open to illegal activities such as deforestation. There is urgent need to shift local mindsets and attitudes towards the environment by encouraging the protection of tree species such as the Mukula by members of local communities.

The National Forestry Policy and the Forests Act, which contain provisions for Community Forest Management (CFM), Joint Forest Management (JFM) and Private Forest Management (PFM) to supplement the forestry department's lack of capacity to manage Zambia's protected forest estate must be implemented for Zambia to realise its full potential and promote sustainable forest management practices. This can be achieved through participation of communities, traditional authorities and NGOs in the management of forests to bolster capacity to manage, monitor and enforce the principles of sustainable forest management.

Government needs to constantly assess and implement measures included in the Forests Act of 2015, including community, joint and private forest management to achieve diversification, wealth creation and attract investment in the forest/timber processing sectors.

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